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Present Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A handler for applying a vacuum holding force to an object, the handler comprising:

a body for applying a vacuum holding force having a plurality of levels of openings including a holding surface level and a suction surface level, wherein the openings at the suction surface level are larger than the openings at the holding surface level, and further wherein the openings at the suction surface level are in fluid communication with at least a portion of the openings at the holding surface level;

at least one intermediate level between the holding surface level and the suction surface level, wherein the openings of the intermediate level are larger than the openings at the holding surface level and smaller than the openings at the suction surface level, whereby n levels are provided including the sum of the total number of levels including the holding level, the surface level and the intermediate levels,

wherein the openings at the holding surface level create a periodic pattern which is characterized by a frequency which is greater than the frequency of the periodic pattern of openings at the suction surface level,

wherein each level has a characteristic thickness defining a length of the openings therein  $t_n$ , and a period  $p_n$ , wherein are substantially equivalent to each other

~~a plurality of micro-valves attached to said openings at the suction surface level;~~  
~~said plurality of micro-valves are hingedly attached to said openings; and~~

a vacuum source attached to said body at the suction surface level.

2-5. (Canceled)

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6. (Currently Amended) The handler as in claim 51, wherein at least a portion of the openings at the suction surface level that are in fluid communication with at least a portion of the openings at the intermediate level are in direct fluid communication by alignment of the openings, and at least a portion of the openings at the intermediate level that are in fluid communication with at least a portion of the openings at the holding surface level are in direct fluid communication by alignment of the openings,

further comprising interconnecting openings for interconnecting openings at the intermediate level and at the holding surface level that are not in direct fluid communication by alignment of the openings.

7. (Original) The handler as in claim 1, further comprising at least one micro-mechanical valve in at least one of the openings.

8. (Previously Presented) The handler as in claim 1 wherein said body is formed of a material selected from the group consisting of metals, alloys, semiconductor materials, and ceramics.

9. (Previously Presented) The handler as in claim 1 wherein said body is formed of a semiconductor material selected from the group consisting of silicon, III-V type semiconductors, II-IV type semiconductors, II-VI type semiconductors, IV-VI type semiconductors, Ge, C, Si-oxide, and Si-nitride.

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10-15. (Canceled)

16. (Currently Amended) A handler for applying a vacuum holding force to an object comprises:

a handler body having a plurality of levels and a vacuum source attached to said handler body, said handler body for applying a vacuum holding force having a thickness, a holding surface at one level having a plurality of holes for imparting vacuum force to an object, and a vacuum surface at another level having at least one hole for a vacuum source, the holding surface holes having diameters suitable for holding fragile objects utilizing a vacuum holding force, wherein vacuum paths are formed from the plurality of holding surface holes to the at least one vacuum surface hole, the vacuum paths configured, positioned and dimensioned to reduce resistance of gas flowing through the vacuum paths, at least one intermediate level between the holding surface level and the suction surface level, wherein the openings of the intermediate level are larger than the openings at the holding surface level and smaller than the openings at the suction surface level, whereby n levels are provided including the sum of the total number of levels including the holding level, the surface level and the intermediate levels, wherein the openings at the holding surface level create a periodic pattern which is characterized by a frequency which is greater than the frequency of the periodic pattern of openings at the suction surface level, wherein each level has a characteristic thickness defining a length of the openings therein  $t_n$ , and a period  $p_n$ , wherein  $t_n$  are substantially equivalent to each other.

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~~and a plurality of micro-valves attached to said holes at the suction surface level,  
the plurality of micro-valves are hingedly attached to the holes.~~

17. (Original) The handler as in claim 16, wherein the ratio of the handler body thickness to holding surface hole diameter is about  $10^7$  to about  $10^2$ .

18. (Original) The handler as in claim 16, wherein the ratio of the handler body thickness to holding surface hole diameter is about  $10^6$  to about  $10^3$ .

19. (Original) The handler as in claim 16, wherein the ratio of the handler body thickness to holding surface hole diameter is about  $10^5$  to about  $10^4$ .

20. (New) The handler as in claim 7, further comprising a plurality of micro-valves attached to said holes at the suction surface level, the plurality of micro-valves are hingedly attached to the holes.

21. (New) The handler as in claim 16, further comprising a plurality of micro-valves attached to said holes at the suction surface level, the plurality of micro-valves are hingedly attached to the holes.